

Elementary

*For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.
(Leviticus 11:44 ESV)*

*I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.
(Leviticus 26:12 ESV)*

What Does The Law Teach Us About Boundaries?

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Leviticus 11:41-47

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Leviticus 11:41. This morning we are trying to answer the question: “What does the Law teach us about boundaries?”

I mentioned last week that the material in the Book of Leviticus is not arranged in a strictly chronological fashion. In fact the Day of Atonement ritual prescribed in chapter 16 follows immediately after the events narrated in chapter 10 concerning the death of Nadab and Abihu. The arrangement is partly chronological but also partly thematic. So we could have done this topic last week, or we could do it this week – because BOTH the Day of Atonement rituals AND the teaching material about respecting boundaries are connected with the traumatic events recorded in chapter 10. Just go back there for a second so you can see this.

In chapter 10 verses 1-3 we have story of how Nadab and Abihu offered UNAUTHORIZED FIRE before the Lord. They broke the rules, they did something they weren’t supposed to and FIRE came out from before the Lord and consumed them.

Then in verses 4-7 we have Moses giving some instructions to the rest of Aaron’s family in terms of how they need to deal with this tragedy. Then in verse 9 God speaks to Aaron directly. Listen very carefully to what he says.

“Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.¹⁰ **You are to distinguish** between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,¹¹ and **you are to teach** the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.” (Leviticus 10:8–11 ESV)

Are you seeing that? God says: “Be sober minded and learn to make distinctions between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean, the life giving and the life destroying. Respect those lines and teach other people to do the same.”

That’s the job description for all those who would serve in the priesthood and that’s WHY in the next couple of chapters we have the introduction of a whole bunch of rules and protocols related to making a distinction – and it starts at the most basic level possible – it starts with FOOD! Which of course, is absolutely brilliant!. How many of you learned math by baking with your mom? What’s $\frac{1}{4}$ plus $\frac{1}{4}$? It’s half a cup of flour, right? This is brilliant pedagogical strategy! Food is the ideal medium for primary instruction and so Aaron is told to teach the people of Israel how to make distinctions through their diet. That’s what these laws are all about.

Now – I’m not saying that there weren’t any health or hygienic benefits – of course there were! Of course, we wouldn’t expect God to create a toxic curriculum for his people anymore than we would expect a decent kindergarten teacher to give his or her students lead based paint to play with – but that isn’t what these laws are ABOUT. Hebrew scholar Baruch Levine says here:

“There is no evidence, however, of a broad nutritional or health-related basis for the specific dietary classifications of the Torah. It is more reasonable to assume a socio-religious basis”¹

And that’s exactly how this material has been understood throughout the majority of church history. Remember, Calvin said:

¹ Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* in The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 248.

“The ceremonial law of the Jews was a tutelage by which the Lord was pleased to exercise, as it were, the childhood of that people...”²

So this is not about weight loss, this is not primarily about building up your immune system – this is about EDUCATION. This is about preparing people to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation – and to do that, you are going to need to develop the skill of MAKING DISTINCTIONS. You are going to need to understand BOUNDARIES. What they are – where they are – and how they function.

With that in mind we are going to read the tail-end of the food laws as presented in Leviticus 11. That will give us a representative sample and it will also allow us to consider the summary statement at the end which provides a bit of a rationale for the whole. We’ll start at verse 41 and read through to verse 47. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

“Every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable; it shall not be eaten.⁴² Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, any swarming thing that swarms on the ground, you shall not eat, for they are detestable.⁴³ You shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become unclean through them.⁴⁴ For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground.⁴⁵ For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

⁴⁶ This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, ⁴⁷ **to make a distinction** between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.” (Leviticus 11:41–47 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Key line there: **to make a distinction.**

²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), paragraph 3315.

If we are ever going to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation – then we need to know the difference between the things that lead to life and the things that lead to death! We need to be WISE and DISCERNING. We need to SEE the boundaries between life and death – clean and unclean – and we need to help other people see them and and to RESPECT what they represent. And the better we are at this, according to the Apostle Paul, the more responsibility we will be given. He says in 2 Timothy 2:21:

“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21 ESV)

So we’re going back to kindergarten today for a refresher course in this whole matter of boundaries, because as modern day North American Christians, we have forgotten an awful lot of this material – and it shows.

So, what does the law teach us about boundaries?

What Does The Law Teach Us About Boundaries?

The first thing the law teaches us here is really obvious – in fact it almost goes without saying, but I’m going to say it anyway:

1. Boundaries are an important aspect of the created order

They are not arbitrary and they are not optional – they’re hardwired in.

Everywhere you look in nature you see clearly defined BOUNDARIES! A cat is not a dog. A dog is not a cat. There are many types of dog, but you can tell where “dog” stops and “cat” starts. And they can tell that too. Cats don’t mate with dogs and if you try to force that or artificially effect that, the creature that would result would be hideous, sterile and almost certainly still born. Nature RESISTS the crossing of boundaries established by God – and so should we. God says that in Jeremiah 5:22-23:

“I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away.” (Jeremiah 5:22–23 ESV)

Are you hearing that? God says: “the SEA respects the boundaries that I established for it – and YET YOU DO NOT! You are a stubborn and rebellious people! You’ve never met a line you didn’t want to cross!”

And of course that what sin is – sin is transgression. That’s why we pray in the Lord’s Prayer:

“Forgive us our trespasses”

Sin is the failure to respect the lines that God has drawn. Sin is thinking we know better. Sin is trusting our desires, our instincts, our inclinations MORE than we trust in the Word of God.

And that never works out in our favour because boundaries are there to protect us from chaos and death.

2. Boundaries protect us from chaos and death

That’s the organizing principle behind the Old Testament dietary code. L. Michael Morales for example says here:

“Many of the unclean animals are associated with death in some fashion, whether in being carnivorous predators or scavengers, living in caves (tombs), or, like pigs, by being associated with underworld deities in pagan worship. Along these lines, creatures that demonstrate some abnormality within their class (like fish without scales) are considered further from the wholeness of an ordered cosmos in terms of life.”³

So again - this is not about health or hygiene it is about religious communication. Anything associated with death is out of bounds. Anything that is blurring the lines is out of bounds. We only want to consume things that are associated with life – we only want to appropriate things that are comfortably at home in their zone. That’s the idea here.

³ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend The Mountain Of The Lord* in *New Studies In Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2015), 158.

Through these dietary protocols the people of God – from a very early age – were being taught to associate boundary crossing with chaos and death.

Happiness was about living in your space. Happiness was about flourishing in your zone. Outside of that – across the line - there was nothing for us but chaos, darkness and death.

That's the elementary principle.

The third thing we're learning in the law about boundaries is that they provide us with an opportunity to demonstrate faith and obedience.

3. Boundaries provide us with an opportunity to demonstrate faith and obedience

That's really the first thing we learn about boundaries in the Bible. In Genesis 2 God puts a fence as it were around the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. He says:

“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16–17 ESV)

Now why in the world would he do that?

Because it was a TEST, obviously!

The tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil wasn't poison it was simply an opportunity for Adam and Eve to demonstrate their willingness or unwillingness to live within the boundaries God had established.

“Will you be creatures under my command or will you attempt to rival me as God?”

“Will you treat my Word as the highest authority in the universe or will you grant authority and Sovereignty to your own desires?”

That was the question - that was the test - and as we learn in Genesis 3 Adam and Eve responded poorly.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.
(Genesis 3:6 ESV)

My friends, every boundary in the universe functions as an opportunity for us to demonstrate faith and obedience! We see the same principle at play in the New Testament. Look at 1 Timothy 2:12-15. I'm aware that this is arguably the most unpopular passage in all the Bible – precisely because it reintroduces the idea that boundaries are a test of faith and people today don't want to hear that any more than Adam and Eve wanted to hear that. Human beings have never STOPPED eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are still trying to be god, DECIDING right and wrong for ourselves. We are boundary crossing machines – and so these boundaries continue to function as a test of faith. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12-15:

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:12–15 ESV)

So in this passage Paul says – human beings got into trouble when they didn't respect the boundaries and the roles that God had assigned. God gave his commandments to Adam to steward for his family. Eve hadn't even been created when God told Adam the rules! But Adam neglected his sphere and as a result, Eve was deceived and she was led into transgression. So Paul says, we won't have any of that in the church – we will force the men to attend to their sphere. They will teach the Word of God in their homes and in the household of faith.

But that isn't to say that there is nothing for women to do - they have a leadership sphere as well! They have been called and equipped as Co-Creators so Paul says that women will be SAVED through child rearing - provided they do so in a spirit of faith, love and holiness.

Now that sounds crazy to our modern ears!! But maybe it sounds a little less crazy given what we talked about last week. Do you remember that weird verse from 1 Peter? In 1 Peter 3:21 the Apostle said:

Baptism, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21 ESV)

We talked last week about how baptism SAVES US – not as a mere ritual – not as if the water in the tank has magical properties – but if we go into the waters AS AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH – if the act of baptism is our appeal to God for a clean conscience through the life and work of Jesus Christ – then it saves us.

Isn't that exactly what Paul is saying to women here in 1 Timothy 2? Child rearing SAVES YOU?! Not as a mere physical act – not simply by undergoing the physical agony of labour and the psychological agony of parenting – no, no, but if you do that AS AN ACT OF FAITH; as a way of expressing trust in the Word and will of God – if you do that believing that his ways are right and lead to life – if that is a leap of FAITH FOR YOU – and you continue in it with love and holiness then it saves you. It says something convincing to God about your heart.

Old Testament and New – how we relate to divinely ordered spheres and boundaries tells the truth about who we are.

Every time we come to a boundary we are communicating something to God about the state of our heart. We are saying “we trust you” or “we don't trust you”, “we love you” or “we don't love you”, “we respect you” or “we don't respect you”.

Boundaries tell the truth.

Now in the time we have left I want to make some practical application in the form of two warnings and an encouragement.

Application: Two Warnings And An Encouragement

The first warning is this:

1. Beware the lure and the lie of libertinism

If you are not familiar with that word, Wikipedia defines libertinism this way, it says:

“A libertine is one devoid of most moral principles, a sense of responsibility, or [sexual](#) restraints, which are seen as unnecessary or undesirable, especially one who ignores or even spurns accepted morals and forms of behaviour sanctified by the larger society.”⁴

So a libertine is someone who DELIGHTS in trampling on boundaries of a moral and particularly sexual nature – and of course as you well know – this attitude is FOSTERED and CELEBRATED in our culture and it has been this way for a very long time. In fact it almost looks like we are running out of lines and boundaries for people to trample on.

25 years ago it was the sexual line. Homosexuality went mainstream in the mid-90’s. Pride Parades flaunted sexual deviance before the eyes of anyone foolish enough to line up along the side of the road. But Pride Parades are nothing now. Homosexuality is old hat. The media, the schools, the influencers, the activists – they certainly won that battle. Homosexuality is not even a line anymore – it’s almost boring.

So now, transgenderism is all the rage. Do you know that in 2018 the UK reported a 4,400 percent increase in terms of the number of teenage girls seeking gender treatments?⁵ Now listen, I’m not saying that there aren’t some children out there wrestling with serious inner confusion and pain – I’m saying there is no way that that accounts for a 4,400% increase in the number of kids seeking transgender treatment. There is something else going on here – some kind of social contagion. Some kind of MASS MOVEMENT toward identifying the gender line as really the last line left for people who want to be rebels, who want to self define, who want to express their own moral, sexual and existential autonomy. But it comes at a terrible cost – a cost they don’t tell you about on YouTube. Cross-sex hormones lead to infertility and massive increases in the risk

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertine>

⁵ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (USA:Regnery Publishing, 2021), 26.

of heart disease. “Top surgery” which is a double mastectomy – leads, obviously to the inability to nurse children.

Those are irreversible consequences.

You can have breast surgery later in life, but that will give you the appearance of breasts – not the ability to nurse a child. And the infertility associated with cross-sex hormone treatment is forever.

The same is true for all these boundaries – the ones that were popular yesterday and the ones that are all the rage today.

The RISK IS BURIED IN THE FINE PRINT!

So beware the madness of crowds! Beware the spirit of the age! Be wise enough to know – and be compassionate enough to SAY to these children - that no boundary in the created order may be trampled upon without significant cost.

That leads to my second warning:

2. Beware of idolizing the inclinations of the human heart

Right now in our culture we are being told to listen to our hearts – to follow our desires. To treat our instincts as authoritative. We’re telling kids: if you think you are something, then you are!!!

If you think you are a boy trapped in a girl’s body – then you are!

But the Bible says:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

Now, obviously this has wider application than merely to the transgender debate, but that issue represents an urgent and immediate manifestation of what we’re talking about here. The current model for counselling children experiencing gender dysphoria is referred to as “Gender-

Affirming Care”, which means that the therapist is required to agree with the self-assessment of the child. If the child says he or she is transgender – then they are!! Simple as that. The patient makes the diagnosis and determines the plan of care – the physician becomes merely a “HEALTH CARE PROVIDER.”

Imagine if we took the same approach with a young girl suffering anorexia. Imagine if she went to her doctor and said: “I feel fat. I think I’m overweight. I need immediate liposuction” and the doctor was required by law to say: “Yes. I can see that you are enormous. Here’s a prescription for that particular surgery.”

That would be insane! And yet that’s exactly what we’re doing in this current crisis because we’ve made a God out of human feelings.

“I feel therefore I am.”

But the Bible says: “No. God speaks and therefore you are.” His Word is authoritative. You are who he says you are. He made you, he knows you, he LOVES YOU, dear one! And therefore safety, health, happiness and LIFE is found only in TRUSTING, LOVING and OBEYING HIM!”

Brothers and sisters, what this world desperately NEEDS to hear is that feelings, desires and self-perception do not determine reality. God determines reality. The people in our culture DESPERATELY NEED TO KNOW that their inner voice is not the ultimate authority in the universe. That inner voice can be hijacked. That inner voice can be confused. That inner voice can change its mind. But the Word of the Lord stands forever.

It will take all the courage we can muster – and all the love we can find – to retain that message and to speak that message boldly and compassionately in our times.

God help us!

Then lastly; we’ve had two warnings, now here’s my closing encouragement:

3. Let the law lead you to Jesus, and let Jesus lead you to the Spirit of God

Ultimately the job of the law is to lead people to Jesus. We aren't doing this series in Leviticus so that we can go back to being led by the law. The law was preparatory and provisional. I trust you understand that. If the New Testament is clear about anything it is clear about the fact that the FOOD LAWS in the Old Testament have expired. Jesus was adamant about that with his disciples. Mark 7 verse 18:

And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) (Mark 7:18–19 ESV)

So please! Don't make your faith about hot dogs and holy days! That was kindergarten!! That was an illustration and a teaching tool and all of that came to an end the moment Jesus – the Word of God in the flesh – walked on to the human stage.

We don't need the shadow anymore – because we have the substance! We have Jesus! We have the way, the truth and the life in all his glorious fullness! Praise the Lord!

So let the law do its work – let it lead you to Jesus. And then let Jesus lead you to the Spirit of God. There is a double hand off here – do you see it? The Apostles talked about it. Paul said:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:14 ESV)

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." (Galatians 5:18 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

The goal here is to get you to the place where you are led by the Spirit. And the law can help with that. The law tells you the truth about your own heart – like every other boundary in the universe. When you come to the law and it says: "Thou shalt not" but your heart says: "Yes I will!" then you need to listen to what the law is saying there. It is saying that you are a rebel. You are broken. You are a transgressor – and you need to be saved.

So go to Jesus!

Go to Jesus as your sacrifice and your Savior! Let him give you a new heart – let him fix your compass and subdue your disordered desires. And let him put his Spirit in you so that you can hear the Lord saying:

“This is the path now walk ye in it!”⁶

Oh my friends - brothers and sisters - this world needs you! This broken world needs a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation – they need people who can make distinctions!! They need people who SEE THE LINES and RESPECT THE DANGERS! They need salt. They need light. They need catchers in the rye and watchmen on the walls!

They need the children of God!

“The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19 NRSV)

This world needs you!! So may the Spirit draw you forth and may the Gospel make you strong and may the Lord himself deploy you for his glory and for the good of the lost and broken people in this land – thanks be to God!

Let me pray for us.

⁶ Paraphrase of Isaiah 30:21.